

The Kentucky Craft Marketing Program's Guiding Hand:

Fran Redmon

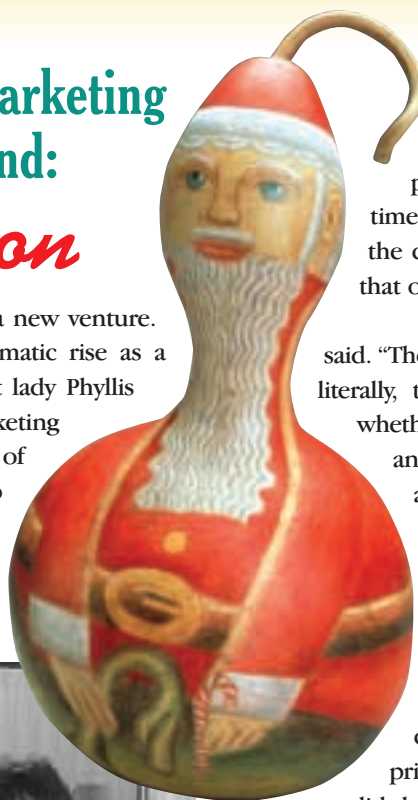
It takes people with vision to establish a new venture. The initial impetus for Kentucky's dramatic rise as a national craft center came from then first lady Phyllis George Brown. In those early days, marketing crafts was not a program; it was a series of loosely connected promotions, like trips to Bloomingdale's in New York City and Nieman Marcus in Los Angeles, and flying craft buyers into Kentucky on purchasing trips to the homes of various craftspeople.



Fran Redmon (l) and Karen Horseman (r) posed with then Phyllis George Brown for a quick snapshot at the 1983 Craft Market. Fran and Karen were the staff of the division of craft, which reported to the Department of the Arts.

These activities were so successful that the then Department of the Arts deemed it necessary to form a division of crafts. But any program that thrives as long as the Craft Marketing Program (CMP) has, growing and becoming a more formidable program with every passing year, must rely on a consistent and committed guiding hand. For CMP, that person is program director Fran Redmon. She literally holds the program's history in her hands.

A Bachelor of Fine Arts graduate of Western Kentucky University, Redmon was already working as a graphic artist for the Department of Public Information when John Y. Brown took office in 1979. Energetic and enthusiastic about her adopted state, Phyllis George Brown immediately began promoting Kentucky craftspeople, and the newly created Department of Tourism, which included Redmon, became involved in



Homestead Arts.

taking craftspeople and their wares to other cities and states and bringing prospective buyers here. Within a short time, all of Redmon's energies were devoted to the crafts whirlwind, and her position became that of a Kentucky-craft-promotion Girl Friday.

"It was all on-the-job training," Redmon said. "The vision was all in Phyllis's head. My job was, literally, to be at the ready, to make it happen," whether it was promotional trips to other states and even other countries, establishing crafts as a presence at the annual Governor's Derby Breakfast, taking visitors to remote locations in the government helicopter to visit artisans in their homes, or getting the first craft market off the ground. She did artwork for program covers, sought out new publications for marketing and advertising, coordinated travel plans, and served as primary problem-solver. "All along, you just did the things that made sense. It always seemed to work," she said, chuckling.

In 1986, she became the first (and, at the time, one of only two employees) formal manager in the craft department of the then Department of the Arts. But soon staff were being added to coordinate museum trips, plan more exhibits, and do the ever-increasing amount of footwork. And although the administration changed every four years, the program had consistent support from government officials, including governors Martha Layne Collins and Brereton Jones. Under the Fletcher administration KAC and CMP are gaining renewed support as part of the newly formed Commerce Cabinet and being organizationally aligned for the first time with agencies such as the Department of Tourism, the



Farmington Art Wearables.



Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea, and the Department of Parks. Redmon has guided all the program's developments, large and small: the Market's move to the Louisville Fairgrounds in 1987 and its subsequent expansions; the 1993 Year of the American Craft celebration in Washington, D.C.; and the establishment of

In partnership with the Kentucky Folk Art Center, Phyllis George produced *The Great American Spirit* and returned to Kentucky for the traveling exhibit's debut at the 2002 Kentucky Craft Market.

innovative programs to keep abreast of the changing times and needs of the craft community and the market at large.

CMP is used as a model throughout the nation. Many states, including Louisiana, Oregon, New Mexico, and Indiana, have requested consultations. The Great Falls Montana State University College of Technology is developing an entrepreneurial program focusing on craft and is using Kentucky's programs, particularly the



From left: Rita Steinberg, executive director Kentucky Art and Craft Foundation; Sue Rosen, gift shop director of KACF; Marie Hochstrasser, American Craft Council; and Fran Redmon at the Haystack School of Craft, 1993.

Market event, as a model. CMP also works in concert with the Kentucky Artisan Center in Berea (KACB). Redmon has served on the KACB advisory board, on the national advisory board of the Kentucky School of Craft, and on the board of the Kentucky Appalachian Artisan Center. She has also been an active member of the Craft Organization Development Association (CODA) since 1989, including a term as chairperson. She currently serves as conference chair and Kentucky will be hosting the 2005 CODA conference in Berea and Hindman in June.

People with vision get great ideas into play, but people with perseverance and unwavering farsightedness make great ideas last. CMP's major accomplishments of the past 20 years are directly attributable to Redmon's devotion to craft and craftspeople in general and to her steady hand at the organization's helm. ❤️

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